LOK SABHA

Tuesday, August 27, 1996/Bhadra 5, 1918 (Saka)

(The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock)

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

[English]

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : Sir, we wish the Deputy Speaker as well as the House a Happy *Onam*. We are celebrating *Onam* in Kerala and we would like to be in Kerala, but we are here. Next time we would like to have a holiday for *Onam*. We wish you all a Happy *Onam*.

SHRI NITISH BHARDWAJ : What about distributing *payasam* to the House?

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : That can be thought of.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Railway Projects

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*361. SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI :
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY :

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Iranian Ambassador in India called on him on June 28, 1996 to discuss, inter alia, various railway projects underway in that country;

(b) if so, whether India has been helping Iran in improvement of the rail transport system since 1976;

(c) whether any fresh agreement between India and Iran has been signed to this effect; and

(d) if so, the extend to which India has agreed to help Iran in the development of railways?

[Translation]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ) : (a) to (d). A statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

STATEMENT

(a) The Iranian Ambassador called on the Railway Minister on 27.6.96, and discussed the various Railway projects underway in Iran.

(b) and (c). The cooperation with Iran in the Field of transport has been going on for more than two decades now. The last MOU was signed by Indian Railway Minister and Iranian Transport Minister in August, 1994, which envisages cooperation in various rail related activities.

(d) Indian has agreed to extend all possible cooperation to Iran for development of their rail system, by way of consultancy, training, project implementation, technology upgradation etc.

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the Hon-Minister the kilometerage length of railway line land so far under the agreement signed with Iran in 1976 and what gains India and Iran have derived thereform?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN) : Sir, I have had talks with Iranian Ambassador on two railway projects - one MOU was signed for 25 million US dollar signal project from Imam to Aaghay, but the Iranian Government now wants to change it from Massad to Sarakh but in length of this line is the same.

[English]

SHRI MADHUKAR SARPATDAR : The question is different. He would like to know the benefits derived by Iran and India.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : What is your question?

[Translation]

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : The Kilometerge length of Railways line laid by you so far under the agreement of 1976 and the benefits India and Iran have received out of it?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : If you want to have a simple answer, then I would say nothing has been laid so far.

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : Nothing has been done so far since 1976?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : No, nothing.

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : This is a big achievement of the railways, Sir !

My second supplementary is: you has signed an agreement for Aabdan and Mashhartoo. Is your reply to this also the same?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN . The onvs lies with Iran and not with India. India wants to do the job. We have RITES which provides consultancy service and the ERCON recentes the work. Now money is involved. I was giving details, but he said that the question was different, otherwise the need for putting this supplementary would not arise. There are two railways projects. One is of railway signal and the other of new railway line. They are from Wagh to Masad and from Karman to Zahedan. We have offered to construct there two railway lines. Iran had invited tenders for there two lines about one year ago and we had offered our tender. The estimated outlay is 700 million U.S. dollars. Now it

depend on Iran. If it gives money. We will take up the construction work and if it does not. we will not under take the job.

SHRI MUKHTAR ANIS : Is there no obstruction from your side?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : No, Sir. No obstructions from our side.

[English]

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY : Sir, we are very happy that on 27th June last year, the Ambassador of Iran had called on the hon. Minister of Railways and requested him to give assistance to implement the projects in Iran. In this connection, I would like to say that in the recent Budget discussion also, virtually most of the hon. Members belonging to every State had been hammering the Railway Ministry, wanting to have new railway lines, wanting to have new bogies and all these things. But for want of money, the Railways are not able to implement them and really satisfy everybody. In fact, even after 50 years, the introduction of new lines is very insignificant. So, why do we not utilise this opportunity of Iran's showing so much interest in our country's science and technology in the field of railways? We know that Iran is a very rich country and it is one of the richest oil producing countries in the world. Is it possible for the hon. Minister to have a dialogue with them to know whether they are interested to come to our country and invest? Now, they are only taking our technological advice. Is it possible to attract the Iran Government or any other investor there, to come to our conutry, as a sort of privatisation, and participate in building up our railway lines and also in the manufacturing of bogies? Is it also possible to introduce the Build-Own-Lease-Transfer scheme as we have done already in the road sector? I feel that this will be very important because stagnation has come.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Mr. Reddy, please be brief.

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY : They are also not able to provide full funds and given satisfaction to us all over the country.

So, I am asking the hon. Minister, (i) is it possible to utlise the participation of the Iran Government in building up our country's railways system; (ii) is it possible to invite more investors or promoters from Iran to build new railway lines in our country; and also (iii) is it possible to have. like in the road sector, Build-Own-Lease-Transfer scheme in our railways sector?

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : No, they have just offered the projects to us for execution and we are examining them. Our cooperation is sofar confined to these two projects. As far as participation of private sector is concerned, we have many schemes, we have BOLT scheme and schemes and if the private sector, whether Indian or foreign, offers to participate, the doors of the Railways are open. We want to encourage them wherever possible. keeping the interest of the country in mind.

[English]

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY : Sir, He has not replied as my question...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Shri Owaisi, you have already asked two supplementary questions the third one is not allowed.

(Interruptions)

[Translation]

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : Sir, my question has not been replied to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It has come to your mind too late.

[English]

No. I am sorry. I have asked the next hon. Member to put a question.

[Translation]

SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : What benefits the daily wagers have received out this agreement?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : No, I am sorry gentleman.

(Interruptions)

DR. T SUBBARAMI REDDY : Sir, I have asked: Is it possible for the Iran Government to help in the implementation of our projects? I have asked a specific question I would like him to reply to that. He is replying only to the question of private projects. What about the Iran Government which is a rich country in oil production? Is it possible to tap them I want a reply for that.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Two countries are involved, not only India. The main question related to the talks held between the Iranian Ambassador and the Indian Railway Minister and the Agreement signed earlier. The point that financial assistance should be taken from Iran or it should use our technology in India was not discussed.

SHRI PAWAN DIWAN : Agilation is going on in Chhattisgarh over the demand for creation of a Bilaspur Railway Zone.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question pertains to Iran.

SHRI PAWAN DIWAN : Various projects are being disucssed.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Chhattisgarh is not in Iran, it is in India. Please sit down.

[English]

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : Sir, it is a good thing that Iran has shown some interest. We have our organisation, called RITES, which is doing very good work in the field of construction, in the field of technology and in the field of works of the Railways. I am sure that RITES is getting orders from abroad also. If we are in a position to increase the efficiency of RITES by way of giving more support financially also to the RITEs, I think, they will be able to do a very good job in respect of our order from abroad which we are going to get.

I would also like to commend at this stage that with regard to some of the services undertaken by RITES...

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please ask the question.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : Will you be prepared to give more support, especially financially and also with regard to other aspects, to RITES, our prestigious public undertaking organisation under the Railways?

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : RITES is doing commendable job and I appreciate this. We will continue to support it if it continue to work in this manner.

SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : What in the number of other countries besides Iran, with whom we have entered into agreements for executing railway projects and how much revenue or income we are receiving from them?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question pertains to Iran.

SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : I am asking about Iran. I would like to know the extent of employment potential it is likely to generate for Indians?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : As far as Iran is concerned, I have already said that an agreement involving an outlay of 25 million U.S. dollar has been signed. We have offered to construct two railway lines - one from wahad to Masad and another from Karman to Zahedan and if this offer is accepted, it will involve a cost of 700 million U.S. dollar and if both the project are accepted, they will involve an outlay of 725 million U.S. dollars. As far as the question of cooperation with other countries is concerned, we have had inquiries from Nepal, Burma, Bangaladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malayausia, Mauritius, Vietnam, Iraq, etc. and we are cooperating with them.

SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : He has not answered the point about employment potential.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : It is not there.

SHRI MUKHTAR ANIS : Iran, since its independence, wants that India should lead the third-world countries and the Central Asian countries have many expectations from India. Now we have a new Government. May I know whether this Government will have talks with Iran afresh in this regard and also take early initiative for having dialogues with other countries with a view to expanding our trade with them?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Sir, I have already said that we are on the threshold and Iran is also anxious in this regard. Sometimes, it shows its interest in the supply of oil, but financial constraints come in the way. But this does not effect or dilute our mutual cooperation or our friendly relations.

SHRI SATYA PAL JAIN : Sir, in the context of the questions asked by Shri Sultan Sahib and Shri Anwarji, I would like to point out to the hon. Minister that whether are agreement is concluded with other countries, the national interest, the gains to be derived by the nation, are taken care of first. Shri Sultan Sahib wanted to know the priorities the Government of India has set for it in the agreement signed or proposed to be signed with Iran and what gain the hon. Minister foresee in it for India? How many persons are going to get employment, how such investment we are going to make in Iran and what benefits our country is going to derive out of it? May I know what are the priorities of Government of India? He is talking in the air that if Iran wanted, we would do it otherwise we would not do it. I want specific information in this regard.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Every agreement involves money and we will execute the job only if it is profitable, we are not going to do it if it involves loss and while determining the profit, we keep the national interest in mind first. We are not going to compromise our national interest. I cannot tell here in the House as to how much profit we will recieve. I have already said that negotiations on one project have been completed and they are going on in respect of other project. We conclude agreements keeping in view both the aspects.

[English]

SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA : This question also pertains to External Affairs. I had the honour of signing this agreement with Iran when I was the Minister of State for External Affairs. It was a trade and transit Agreement with Iran. The object of this Agreement, as my friends have asked about the gain to India, was to open trade with CIS States like Uzbekistan, Kirghiztan and Azerbaijan. With all these areas, we have a traditional relation and we wanted to open trade with them. But we do not have any route or access to that. therefore, we approached Iran. So, it is with our common interest to approach that area by a rail link so that trade between India and that area could improve. There is a track of 130 miles only which requires to be built.

JUSTICE GUMAN MAL LODHA : Sir, this is not a question and he is not the concerned Minister to give the answer. He can ask a straight question to the Minister ...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Please put your question after giving this background.

[English]

SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA : Sir, their party Member has raised a question about the priority of India for signing this Agreement and I am replying to them through you. Now, our priority is to reach the CIS States and open a trade line with them and that is only an internal agreement with that country.

[Translation]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Bhatiaji, you cannot reply. Please put questions after giving the background.

SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA : I am coming to the question. I have just given the background. We have given them tenders for that area in which it will be properly linking the two states from Bandar Abbas to Mashhad and from Mashhad to Baisek. So, this is where India and Indian Railways come and it will be beneficial for both the countries to reach that State and to have more trade with USA.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I do not think there is any question in this.

Steam Loco Engine Workers

*362. SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

(a) whether due to the phasing out of steam local engines several thousands of coal and ash handling workers doing perennial jobs have been thrown out of employment;

(b) whether the Government have received any representation demanding re-deployment of these workers in suitable fields; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

[Translation]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ) : (a) to (c). A statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

STATEMENT

(a) Phasing out of steam engines have resulted in Railways discontinuing their contracts for coal and ash handling in the steam sheds which has been closed. A number of labourers who were engaged on these jobs by the contractors from time to time would have either been discontinued from employment by their employers or may have obtained alternate employment.

(b) and (c). Yes Sir, Railways have received representations, some of them forwarded by Honourable Members of Parliament regarding absorption of these coal and ash handling labours in the Railways. Railways have regretted their inability to absorb them in Railway service since Railways have not liability or responsibility for these labourers engaged by private contractors. Moreover, Railways are already saddled with the problem of re-deployment of a large number of regular railway staff rendered surplus on account of closure of steam sheds and of providing alternate employment to a number of casual labours directly engaged by the Railways.

Some of these labourers have also filed civil Appeal Petitions before the Supreme Court for their absorption in Railways. The case is still sub-judice and the final judgement in this case is awaited.

[English]

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, I am very unhappy with the reply that has been given by the hon. Railway Minister. It is stated that it is the responsibility of the private contract to provide employment to the workers who have been rendered jobless as a result of the phasing out of the steam loco shed and related works like handling of coal and ash. I did not at all expect such a reply from an outspoken Railway Minister who is considered to be committed to the cause of the deprived and the downtrodden. It has already been settled through a direction of the Supreme court as long back as in March, 1993 which said that this issue should be considered by the Ministry of Railways. The Supreme Court has directed the then Railway Minister that these workers should be absorbed because they has been serving the Railways at a stretch and without any break for a period ranging between 15 to 25 years. This is a very usual practice followed by the Railways. On the basis of that directive of the Supreme court, as long back as on July 25,1991 the former Railway Minister has given an assurance, even on the floor of this House, that these workers would be absorbed.

Sir, now the Railways Minister, in his Budget speech, has come out with a scheme - which we all greeted with thumping of our desks - whereby about 56,000 casual workers would be absorbed. These poor people, these six thousand people, many of whom have already died of stravation are in abject misery and no words could describe their condition. They had been doing very very perennial nature of jobs in the Railways. The present Railway minister, when he was the Labour Minister, himself has considered this question. The Assurances Committee has taken up this question and made specific recommendations on the basis of the assurance given by the then Railway Minister and said that these workers doing perennial nature of jobs without any break and at a stretch for a period ranging between 15 to 20 years, will gradually get absorbed in the modernisation schemes of the Railways.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please come to the question.